



Connecticut League of History Organizations
Central Connecticut State University
Department of History
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26 February 2023

Dear Members of the Conservation and Development Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee,

I write to you today in opposition to HB 6659, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025, and Making Appropriations Therefor. I live in Middletown, and am the Executive Director of the Connecticut League of History Organizations (CLHO) in New Britain, a membership organization that serves as Connecticut's state museum association. Since 1950, CLHO has worked to professionalize the sector, enhance heritage tourism, and train the next generation of museum professionals right here in Connecticut. Through programs, workshops, professional development and networking opportunities, an annual awards program, and a conference that brings together over 200 museum people from across the state and region each year, we help museums large and small serve their communities better. Our partnership with the Public History Program at Central Connecticut State University supports workforce development, connecting emerging professionals with internships and job opportunities to ensure they find work in the state when they graduate.

The Governor's proposed budget returns state funding for arts, culture, and tourism to 2019 levels. That level of funding was inadequate then, and is even more inadequate now. We have long lagged behind our neighboring states in these areas. For every dollar Connecticut invested per capita in arts and culture in 2020, Massachusetts and New York invested \$1.60 and Rhode Island invested \$2. Those states have also outpaced us in tourism spending as well: before the pandemic, Connecticut spent just \$1.11 per capita, while Massachusetts spent \$1.65, New York \$3.07, and Rhode Island \$5.05. This hampers our ability to compete for tourists—and means that not only are Connecticut's vibrant arts and culture organizations missing out on potential visitors, but the local businesses that surround them are missing out on potential patrons.

The past two years have shown what meaningful state investment in Connecticut's cultural sector can do. As the leader of our state's museum association, I can attest to the transformative impact the most recent biennial budget has had at organizations large and small. When we think of Connecticut museums, we often think of places like Mystic Seaport or the Mark Twain House. CLHO represents these and many other well-known museums across the state. But the plurality of Connecticut's museums—and our 400+ members—are small and mid-sized organizations, many of which have only one paid staff member, or rely solely on passionate volunteers. These small museums steward incredible collections, and are often the first place a local resident will go to understand something about their town, their family history, or their place in Connecticut. At these institutions, investments go a very long way—and the CT Cultural Fund has had an immediate and

transformational impact. These small museums have been hiring those volunteers, sending funds back into the community. They have been equipping themselves with technology to make their collections and stories visible to a wider and more digitally-minded audience, supporting tourism in CT and beyond. The explosion of postings on our jobs board has prompted us to implement a new system just to keep up!

At CLHO, these funds have allowed us to hire four new staff members and 12 new contractors, turning what a year ago was a tiny operation consisting of myself and a part-time student, into an organization with the capacity to support a wider and more diverse membership with new direct-service programs. One of these of which I am particularly proud is [Museum Makeover](#), which sends a team of professional curators out to museums across the state to help them make immediate improvements to the visitor experience at their sites—and provides up to \$3,000 to implement them. In 2022, our 11 Traveling Curators assisted with exhibit and collections projects at 15 museums in every corner of the state. Together, these museums serve more than 85,000 visitors annually, and employ 50 full- and part-time staff members, as well as 713 volunteers from their communities. Demand for the program has been so strong that we plan to expand the program to 18 organizations with up to \$4,000 apiece in 2023.

Programs like Museum Makeover—a collaboration with Conservation ConneCTion, a program of the Connecticut State Library—would be impossible to sustain without continued investment in Connecticut’s cultural sector. I urge you to oppose this budget and consider as an alternative the funding roadmap for arts, culture, and tourism proposed in raised HB 6692, which would provide meaningful, reliable, and equitable investment in these important contributors to the state’s economy and workforce. If the governor’s proposed budget goes forward, I will be forced to lay off staff and cut programs that are in high demand. Let’s not go backward—let’s move forward together, on a path that has already proven itself worthy. The dividends of these investments accrue not just to the cultural organizations we represent, but to the wide communities they serve across the state and beyond—and to the next generation of museum professionals, who will be able to find well-paying jobs in the field they love.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Amrys O. Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Amrys" being more prominent and the last name "Williams" following in a similar style.

Amrys O. Williams, Ph.D.

Executive Director, Connecticut League of History Organizations

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